**Delivering the Goods**  
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As she waits to hear if her program at El Dorado High School in El Paso, Texas, will receive a Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) award this year, school counselor Diana Aguire reflects on their three-year journey to this milestone. “It seems like yesterday that we started this program. We knew it would entail a lot of work, and it did.”

Prior to implementing the ASCA National Model®, Aguire spent more time on paperwork than anything else. “I would go months and months without being in the classroom,” Aguire said. “I kept thinking there had to be more to this than paperwork.” When her district supervisor, Hilda Lopez, started coming in with new ideas about getting into the classroom, Aguire quickly agreed. “I contacted the principal and asked, ‘Can we talk to you about this new program?’”

With the principal’s support in hand, the El Dorado High School counselors began aligning their program with the ASCA National Model. Since they had three counselors, they divided their delivery system into academic, career and personal/social domains, and then assigned each counselor a specific domain. Aguire, who handles the academic domain, fully supports this team approach to delivery. “When you work together and trust each other, it makes things much easier,” she said. “You can do a lot individually, but when you pull together, you can do so much more.”

With her school in one of the fastest-growing school districts in Texas, Aguire also appreciates the flexibility and data-driven nature of the delivery system. “It’s a living program. If it’s not working well, we can change it.” Pre-tests, post-tests, as well as student satisfaction surveys all contribute to how they track their program’s effectiveness.

Now that the “early years” of the program are behind her, Aguire looks to the future. “Of course I’d love to get the RAMP award,” Aguire said, “but the process was more important because it allowed us to look at every aspect of our program.”

**What Happens Next?**   
Once the foundation and management portions of a comprehensive school counseling program are in place, a school counselor’s attention turns to the logistical question of, “How will we implement this program?” The comprehensive delivery system is composed of four components: guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsiveness services and system support. All elements of a counseling program fit into one of these four categories.

“The [ASCA National] Model gives me a place to put things,” said Alice Geiss, school counselor at Olive Chapel Elementary School in Apex, N.C. Geiss, whose program received a RAMP award last year, initially implemented an abbreviated version of the program, then expanded as her comfort level and understanding increased. “The more you talk about it and work with it, the more it makes sense.”

“With all four components of the Delivery system, you’re covering everybody,” Lopez said, “not just counseling the ones who walk through the door.” Lopez, whose district is moving toward full implementation of the ASCA National Model, started with the delivery system “because it was a common language for everyone.”

**Guidance Curriculum: Being ready, willing and able to go into the classroom.** The first component of the delivery system is having a comprehensive school guidance curriculum that promotes knowledge, attitudes and skills in the domains of academic achievement, career development and personal/social growth. School counselors go into the classroom and teach all students the same competencies.

This strategic component ensures that counseling programs reach every student in a systematic way – a dramatic shift from the “come see me” philosophy of traditional school counseling.

According to Judy Bowers, counseling supervisor in Tucson, Ariz., and co-author of “The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs,” two common challenges occur when implementing a school guidance curriculum. First, not all counselors want to be, or feel prepared to be, in the classroom, and second, even if prepared, not all counselors can get into the classroom.

Many counselors chose their profession because they wanted to work with students but didn’t necessarily want to teach. For them, suggesting they go into the classroom is like suddenly changing the rules. It’s a new mindset, Bowers says, one that requires an understanding of how a classroom presence increases their effectiveness as a counselor and allows them to reach more students than they previously could.

With many states not requiring teacher certification for school counselors, some counselors simply don’t have the training to feel comfortable in front of a classroom. In addition, they don’t know how to choose or develop a curriculum. Colleges are addressing these problems by having counseling students go into the classroom as part of their program. Bowers encourages school counselors to develop their own curriculum using standardized templates and materials such as the elementary lessons available on her district’s Web site.

For Geiss, the only counselor in an elementary school with 900 students, the challenge is finding the time to get into the classroom. “We have over 40 classes.” Having a good intern helps make the workload more manageable. She’s encouraged, though, by the enthusiastic response she receives from her colleagues. “Elementary teachers want us to come in and do lessons.”

High school counselors, however, often have a more difficult time. Because teachers are hard-pressed to get through their own required curriculum, many don’t want to give up their core class time to school counselors.

So, how does a counselor facing resistance or time issues go about getting into the classroom? Bowers suggests starting with just a few teachers or finding one consistent class that school counselors can go in and still reach all the students. For instance, Aguire delivers all of her academic presentations through the English department, career lessons through the math and science departments and personal/social lessons through the social studies department.

Another strategy is to start with new teachers as they come into the school; forming a bond early on can help down the road. School counselors can also team-teach in the classroom, allowing teachers to see firsthand how the lessons’ impact. The best strategy, advises Bowers, is to have the principal’s support. “A strong principal can help get counselors in the classroom right away.”

Whatever the path into the classroom, teachers will soon realize and appreciate the benefits of a school guidance curriculum. “Teachers who were hesitant about counselors coming into the classroom are now praising how good it is,” Lopez said. “We’ve shown teachers that we’re in it for student achievement.”

Because an increased presence in the classroom also increases counselor visibility with students, counselors can expect more student traffic in their office, at least initially. “The more counselors go into the classroom, the more business they generate,” Lopez said. “How do we manage that? It’s an unintended consequence that we need to address.”

**Individual Student Planning: Preparing for the future.** Although the classroom provides school counselors the opportunity to reach students at the aggregate level, the second component of a delivery system, individual student planning, allows more personalized attention. Counselors can work more closely with students – on an individual basis or in small groups – helping them with activities such as setting personal goals and developing plans for the future.

Although the time spent in individual student planning varies depending on grade level – high school students need more college and career guidance than say, elementary students – all counseling programs benefit from a strong emphasis in this area. Students needing particular attention, Bowers says, are English language learners and those needing assistance with graduation plans.

School counselors can’t spend all of their time with individual students, however. That’s when small-group sessions provide an effective alternative. “Small groups are such an important part of what counselor should be doing,” Bowers said. “It’s an area where counselors need to be spending more time.” For school counselors uncertain about their ability to conduct group sessions, Bowers suggests resources such as “how-to” books and guides, training, as well as practice.

**Responsiveness Services: Breaking away from the comfort zone.** Responding to students’ immediate needs and concerns encompasses the most traditional role of the school counselor – and most of the school counselor’s time. This is where the majority of school counselors feel the most at home – providing counseling, consultation and referrals. “Counselors like to help people,” Bowers said. “They are most comfortable here.”

That comfort level, however, can easily lead to school counselors spending too much of their time in this traditional role. Because of the one-on-one or small-group nature of responsiveness services, it helps only a few students, which is opposite the “reach every student” philosophy of a comprehensive school counseling program.

Time management also becomes a concern with responsive services. “If you’re sitting in your office, people will come to you,” Bowers said. School counselors can get bogged down with issues that don’t require the skills of a counselor to resolve. Ironically, school counselors can spend most of their time dealing with issues that might have been prevented had they been able to be in the classroom delivering effective school guidance curriculum.

Finding the appropriate balance in responsive services allows school counselors to focus on what’s really important, helping students create an environment more conducive to their development. To create that focus, Lopez suggests simply asking, “What are the barriers to learning?”

**System Support: Strengthening your influence.** Even the most comprehensive delivery system would not be complete without the ability to monitor its effectiveness and improve it going forward. A solid system support component engages the outside resources necessary for the school counselor to establish, maintain and enhance the total school counseling program.

“This is an area where counselors have not always put a lot of thought,” Bowers said. “It’s the only component of the delivery system that does not include the students.”

Activities such as professional development; consultation, collaboration and teaming; and program management allow the school counselor to play vital leadership and advocacy roles. “The more you advocate the results of your program, the more support you will have,” Lopez said.

Professional development is critical for counselors to keep up with developments in their field. In-service training, memberships in professional associations and post-graduate education are all ways for school counselors to refresh and share their skills and knowledge. Bowers encourages counselors in her district to be members of state and national associations and to do something each quarter for their own professional development.

In her district, Lopez asks what skills all counselors have to have. “Then we offer both mandatory and optional training to get them there.”

Consultation, collaboration and teaming go a long way in assuring the school counselors they are not alone. Input from colleagues; partnerships with staff, parents and the community; and support from advisory councils and district committees all contribute to a well-rounded, well-supported program.

In El Paso, Lopez has had success speaking to school counselors, principals, administrators and area universities about the importance of a comprehensive school counseling program. She also credits their districtwide advisory council for ongoing collaboration opportunities.

At El Dorado High School, Aguire teams with middle school counselors from feeder schools so eighth graders get the same information the freshmen receive. “When they come in as freshman, it’s not new to them. Students are better informed and have more knowledge from day one.”

Program management and operations includes the management activities, including data analysis and fair-share responsibilities, needed to support the school counseling program. “I think it’s important that school counselors have a vehicle for showing what we’re doing and that we’re making a difference,” Geiss said. “Sitting down and putting all the data together is time-consuming, but it’s meaningful. It allows us to evaluate our own work.”

“Sometimes you find that your program did work, sometimes that it didn’t,” Lopez said. “Both of those pieces are just as valuable.”

**Putting the Pieces Together**  
Since most counselors are already stretched too thin in their jobs, just the thought of a new program can be overwhelming. “It really helps to have a coordinator – someone to make it happen,” Bowers suggests. It’s also important to have the principal on your side. “If you don’t have support from your principal, it’s almost impossible to have success,” Aguire said.

School counselors offer unanimous advice for those about to implement the delivery portion of the ASCA National Model: start small and grow from there. “Start slow,” Aguire advises. “Celebrate your successes, no matter how big or small.”

“It’s a process,” Geiss said. “Just take it piece by piece.”

Lopez sees it a challenge well worth the effort. “People need to understand that it’s a whole lot more work, but they will start seeing the payoff.”

Bowers sums up the importance of the delivery system in one sentence: “It’s the heart of what we do.”

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